The Chronicle and Index

OF THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

No. 71, Vol. vi.] BELFAST, NOVEMBER 1st, 1886. [For Gratuitous Circulation.

THE Rev. J. C. Street begs to acknowledge the receipt of the following subscriptions in aid of the gratuitous publication of the *Chronicle and Index*:—

Miss M'Mechan, Ballee, -	£0	2	6
Miss Jardine, Dromore, -	0	2	6
J. G., Belfast, - -	0	2	0
J. Salsbury, Nottingham,	0	2	6
A Friend, Belfast, - -	0	5	0

A VERY useful and successful Bazaar was held at the beginning of last month in the Central Hall, Rosemary Street, on behalf of the York Street Congregation. It was duly and gracefully opened by Professor Hodges, M.D., of the Second Congregation, who was surrounded on the occasion by a considerable body of ministers and members of our various congregations, who had gathered together in support of the good work undertaken by the York Street Congregation. We have not heard the exact amount realized by the sales and gifts at the Bazaar, but are assured that the result was highly satisfactory, and that the great financial difficulty which had stood in the way of our friends has been practically removed. We congratulate all who were concerned in the Bazaar on the success of their exertions.

THE following have been the subjects of the Rev. J. C. Street's discourses during the month of October:—

October 3rd—*Morning*—"The Path I went, and that alone was the right Path for me." *Evening*—"Storm and Calm."

October 10th—*Morning*—"Onward, ever Onward!" *Evening*—"Light behind the Clouds."

October 17th—*Morning*—"Work, for the Night is Coming." *Evening*—"The Omnipotence of Love."

October 24th—*Morning*—"Up to the Hills I lift mine Eyes." *Evening*—"The Secret of Death."

October 31st—*Morning*—"A Cloud of Witnesses around." *Evening*—"The Sacrament of Life."

The attendance has been excellent, and in the evenings there have been present large numbers of strangers.

WE observe with pleasure that Belfast has been favoured with a visit from the heterodox orator and preacher, Henry Ward Beecher. He obtained a splendid hearing from a vast audience, and his fine breezy discourse could not help but awake high thought, and a broader catholicity among those who heard him. The semi-private breakfast given to him in the Lombard Hall was a pleasing tribute to his worth, and his speech on the occasion was, in every respect, worthy of the man.

THE Sunday School connected with the Second Congregation, Belfast, was re-opened on Sunday, October 3rd, after the summer vacation. There was a good gathering of both scholars and teachers. A Religious Service was held. The service was read by the superintendent of the school, Mr. D. Bulmer, and then the Rev. J. C. Street delivered an address on the story of "Moses in Egypt." He asked questions on the story as he went along,

and thoroughly enlisted the attention of his audience. The children answered most intelligently, and showed that they had followed the address with the greatest attention. The school is now regularly at work.

The first of the Monthly Religious Services for the winter season in connection with Hopeton Street School was held on Sunday, Oct. 17th, at three o'clock. The attendance was not so large as on previous occasions, owing, it is believed, to the disorder that has been so long continued in the neighbourhood. Mr. Bulmer gave out the hymns, and the remainder of the service was conducted by the Rev. J. C. Street, who delivered an address on "Deliverance to the Captives." He was listened to with great attention, and the children heartily joined in the singing of the hymns.

We have been informed that a new and vigorous effort is being made to resuscitate the congregation at Ballymena. Mr. Hall, a brother of the Rev. J. Hall, of Glenarm, has been appointed missionary, and we understand that he is to enter upon his work immediately. We hope his efforts may be crowned with success.

The opening conversazione of the fifteenth session of the Rosemary Street Mutual Improvement Association was held on Tuesday, October 4th, in the Schoolroom and Lecture Hall, Rosemary Street. The members were present in considerable strength to inaugurate the ensuing session's work. Tea was provided in the schoolroom at seven o'clock, the chair being taken in the Lecture Hall at eight by the President, the Rev. J. C. Street. The following were also present:—Rev. J. A. Kelly, Rev. W. Reynolds, B.A.; Mr. Thomas M'Clelland, J.P.; Mr. George Fisher, Mr. Hugh Hyndman, LL.D.; Mr. W. J. Roche, Mr. John F. Mulligan, Mr. J. M. Dobbin, Mr. W. C. Dobbin, &c. The President, in the course of his inaugural address, dealt principally with the state of National Education in Ireland as contrasted with that of England and Scotland, pointing out the advantages of the compulsory system and the need for its extension to this country. Speaking of the Association itself, it was, so far as he knew, the oldest of its kind in the North of Ireland. He referred in the highest terms to the good work it had already done and the wide area over which its influence had extended, and contended that its sound basis and high tone were the best grounds for anticipating for it a future career as honourable as its past history. Rev. W. Reynolds also addressed the meeting, and in the course of a short but most interesting speech bore testimony to the excellence of the work carried on by the Society, pointing out especially the comprehensive nature of its constitution, as witnessed by the wide extremes included within its membership. A number of new members having been duly elected, a most enjoyable programme of music, readings, and recitations was gone through, in which the following ladies and gentlemen took part:—Mademoiselles Fisher, Dobbin, Roche, and Muirhead; and Messrs. Mahood, Gordon, Millar, Dale, Hyndman, Neilly, Ladell, and Morrison. The usual votes of thanks brought a very pleasant evening to a close.

On the following Monday evenings there was an excellent attendance of members, and several new members were elected. On October 11th, the Rev. J. C. Street lectured to a very full audience on "Light and Shadows of Life in Belfast;" on the 18th, Mr. J. D. Stuart read a fine Paper on "Thackeray;" and on the 25th, the Rev. G. W. Bannister introduced a discussion on "Land and Labour." At all the meetings there was manifested great interest in the proceedings, and many of the members took an intelligent part in the various discussions. The session has begun vigourously, and the Society promises not only to keep up its high reputation, but to grow more useful than ever.

On Tuesday evening, October 12th, a Sunday School Conference, in connection with the Unitarian Society, was held in the Schoolroom at Moneyrea. The meeting was largely attended, and among those present were—The Revs. J. C. Street, president; T. Dunkerley,

B.A.; Henry M'Gowan, E. S. Anthony, M.A.; G. W. Bannister; and J. H. Bibby; Messrs. M'Calmont, Bulmer, Blackeley Orr, Bodell, Anderson, Lamont, Spence, &c. The meeting was opened with prayer. The President, in a few well-chosen words, then called upon the Rev. E. S. Anthony, M.A., who read the following Paper on

CONFIRMATION SERVICES.

"When I was invited to contribute a Paper for the present Conference I was somewhat at a loss to select a suitable subject. Most of the topics connected with Sunday School work have been discussed so often that they are worn threadbare, and it is impossible to say anything about them which has not been said before. This is my excuse for venturing somewhat beyond the beaten track, and introducing a subject which may seem to have but little to do with Sunday Schools. I cannot, indeed, claim for my subject the charm of absolute novelty, but it is at any rate less hackneyed than the ordinary run of Sunday School subjects. And it is not without its bearing on the Sunday School, although the connection may appear but slight.

"We have in our Sunday Schools a number of young people who are growing up into men and women. They will soon be leaving school, and then what will become of them? It is, of course, our desire that when they leave the school they should attach themselves to the church, and take their places as members of the congregation; and it may be presumed that we shall put forth our endeavours to accomplish this result. But if we fail to do this, we shall lose our hold on the young people and they will slip away from us altogether. There is probably less danger of this 'leakage' in Ireland than in the case of our English Sunday Schools, because the circumstances are somewhat different. The scholars in our Irish schools are almost all children of members of the congregation, whereas in England the parents of the Sunday scholars are chiefly outsiders. In the latter case there is much greater likelihood of losing the young people when they cease to attend the school than there is in the former, but in all probability the danger exists to some extent even here. Again, the danger of 'leakage' is further minimised in Ireland by the great importance attached to the communion service, and the special preparation for its first reception. The practice in this respect varies considerably however. I find on enquiry that in some cases the communicants' class is carried on for six or eight weeks, and a full course of religious instruction is given, while in other cases the preparation for a first communion is hurried over as quickly as possibly, and consists merely in half an hours' conversation with the minister on the morning of the fast-day. Of course even this is better than no preparation at all; still it cannot be considered satisfactory. And whatever preparatory instruction is given, it is very desirable that the entrance of the young people into full church membership should be marked by a solemn service at which they are received into complete fellowship. Other denominations have their services of this kind, and why should not we follow their example? The Baptists have their ceremony of adult baptism, and there is much to be said in favour of this practice. For my part, however, I prefer the rite of confirmation, which is customary in the Church of England. This is a very ancient rite, the origin of which is traced to the apostolic practice recorded in the Book of Acts. There we read that the apostles were in the habit of laying their hands on the newly baptised converts, and praying that they might receive the Holy Spirit. At that time it was a kind of supplement to baptism, and was regarded to some extent as its completion. In course of time, as infant baptism became general, confirmation no longer immediately followed the baptism, but was deferred until the child had attained to years of discretion. The ceremony then acquired a new significance —it became a solemn re-dedication of themselves by the baptised, who now made a public profession of Christian discipleship. By so doing they took upon themselves the promises made on their behalf by their sponsors, who were thus relieved from any further responsibility. In the Roman Catholic Church, con-

firmation is one of the seven sacraments, but it is not considered a sacrament by Protestants. It is in use among the German Lutherans as well as in the Church of England, but the English Puritans discarded it along with the Episcopal form of church government. In so doing, however, they seem to have acted without sufficient reason, for in the rite of confirmation there is nothing necessarily sacerdotal or superstitious. No doubt, as understood by Roman Catholics and High Churchmen, there is a miraculous efficacy in the laying on of the bishop's hands, by which act it is supposed that a supernatural grace is conveyed to the person confirmed; but this is not the Protestant belief. We have an unwilling testimony to the Protestant character of confirmation as practised in the Church of England in an article by the Rev. Dr. F. G. Lee, in the *Nineteenth Century*, a few years ago (Nov. 1881.) The writer, who is an extreme High Churchman, says—'The sacrament of confirmation was altogether lost in the Church of England. The new rite *was* a new rite and nothing more—a rite in which persons themselves openly renewed their baptismal vows while the chief minister prayed for a blessing upon their public act of self-dedication. It was a rite oftentimes solemn and impressive, but no sacrament.' The laying on of hands, moreover, is retained in the case of Presbyterian ordination, without implying any idea of a miraculous efficacy in the act. There is nothing, then, in the rite of confirmation to which we as liberal Christians can reasonably object, and accordingly such services have been held in recent years in various parts of England. They are still somewhat exceptional, and are regarded as more or less of an innovation. Yet the suggestion to adopt this impressive rite is not in reality a new one. In a liturgy used in one or two of our churches, the second edition of which was published so long ago as 1852, the 'order of confirmation' duly appears among the occasional offices, and is thus referred to in the preface to the first edition:—The service for confirmation should be universally introduced; or one great duty of the Church towards those whom in infancy it baptised and dedicated to God in the gospel of Christ is neglected, at that critical time of life when such a ceremony is calculated to make a lasting and valuable impression on their minds. To bring the young at any age when they can know the truth, and before the world has had time to alienate their affections from it, or to harden their hearts in despising it, in the presence of the Church, to make a voluntary and solemn expression of their desire to be fully adopted into its communion, is an obvious duty of Christian policy, of the sad effects of the prevalent neglect of which we have innumerable proofs.' In the more widely known 'Common Prayer for Christian Worship,' first published in 1862, and used by a great many of our churches in England, the 'order of confirmation' is also included, and the meaning of the service is thus explained in the introductory address to those about to be confirmed:—Dearly beloved, in your infancy, when you could not know the blessedness of the Christian religion, those who best loved you expressed in the most solemn manner, with prayer to almighty God, their desire that you should be partakers of this inestimable blessedness; and pledged themselves to instruct you in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. You have now reached an age at which it might reasonably be hoped that you would, by your own voluntary act, take upon yourselves the responsibility of a public Christian profession: and forasmuch as you have signified your desire so to do, let me ask you in the presence of this congregation, Will you renounce the fellowship of evil, and endeavour to learn and do the will of God as revealed by Jesus Christ?' Although the service was contained in the book, it has been very generally neglected, though one or two efforts have been made to rescue it from oblivion. One of the earliest confirmation services, perhaps the very earliest ever conducted in a Unitarian place of worship, was held at Nottingham, twenty years ago, and as I was privileged to be present on the oceasion, I may perhaps be allowed to give a few personal reminiscences. At that time I was a small boy at school, and I attended the High Pavement Chapel, then under the ministry of the Rev. P. W. Clayden. One Sunday Mr. Clayden spoke

from the pulpit on the subject of confirmation, pointing out the fact that we had such a service in our prayer book, and as it was in the book, he presumed it was intended to be used. He thereupon announced his intention of holding a confirmation service, and of conducting a preparatory class, to which he invited all young persons of sixteen or upwards who might be willing to join. The confirmation took place upon Whit Sunday; the young people about to be confirmed were sixty in number, and they occupied the front pews. The chief part of the service was conducted by the Rev. John James Tayler, Principal of Manchester New College, who delivered an appropriate address. I was not myself one of those who were confirmed, as I was not old enough at the time to be admitted; but though I was only a spectator, the service made a deep and lasting impression upon me, and I longed for the time to come when I should participate in such a service. The opportunity never came, however, and I have never been present at a confirmation service in one of our churches since that day. Although the experiment was very successful it was not generally taken up. A few similar services have since been held here and there; but, so far as I am aware, the rite has not taken its place as a recognised institution in any of our congregations with the exception of Kidderminster. At this place, under the energetic ministry of the Rev. W. Carey Walters, confirmation services have been held annually, with great success; and I have no doubt they would be equally successful in other places if they were taken up with the same spirit of zeal and enthusiasm.

"In some cases where similar services have been held, there has been an apparent unwillingness to call them by the name by which they are generally known. There seems to be some prejudice against the name 'confirmation,' and thus we sometimes hear instead of dedication services, consecration services, or recognition services. Many of our people object to anything which they consider 'churchy;' they have a dislike to anything which is borrowed from the Episcopalians. But unless we are to be altogether different from other people, we may just as well borrow from the Episcopalians as from the Methodists, Independents, or Presbyterians. If any institution is good in itself, and worthy to be adopted on its own merits, we must not condemn it because it happens to be more closely associated with one or other of these denominations; and if we borrow a rite or ceremony, we had better borrow also the name by which it is known. If, therefore, we hold what are practically confirmation services, it is best to call them so, and not to disguise them under some other name. The suggested alternatives have the decided drawback that they are all in use to designate ceremonies of an entirely different character, and an undesirable ambiguity would thus be introduced. Dedication is perhaps the best of the three, but it is frequently used to denote a service which is a substitute for infant baptism: children are sometimes 'dedicated' without being christened. It is also used in connection with the opening of places of worship: we hear of a church being dedicated. Consecration, likewise, is a term chiefly used in connection with churches, and also in connection with the setting apart of bishops and archbishops. Recognition services are held among the Independents and Baptists to celebrate the settlement of a new pastor, and are practically equivalent to installations. If, then, we adopt any of these terms we are more likely to be misunderstood than if we keep to the word confirmation, the meaning of which is well known, and not ambiguous. The name is very appropriate, because the object of the service is to confirm or strengthen those who take part in it; to establish them in the Christian faith, to fortify them against temptation, and to give them courage to fight the battle of life.

"This is the leading idea of the service, which finds its fitting expression in the prayer that God will 'strengthen his servants in their holy purpose' and confer upon them the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit:—The spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and strength; the spirit of knowledge and true godliness, and of the fear of the Lord."

Rev. G. W. Bannister said he was happy to

welcome this Conference to Moneyrea, and especially to welcome so old and tried a friend of the congregation as their chairman. As for confirmation services, he did not like them, or at least he did not like the word confirmation. The common notion was that confirmation meant a service in which some special grace ran from the finger tips of a bishop, and he therefore felt that it would be spiritually unhealthy to do anything whatever that would foster such a feeling in the Unitarian Church. He for one would rather have classes in which their own school of theology could be taught. He felt, however, that there was a difficulty in getting together the young people connected with country congregations, and would be glad if some brother minister would give him a workable suggestion.

Rev. Henry M'Gowan spoke in high terms of the Paper, but thought that in Ireland confirmation services were not so much needed as they were in England, because the communion service is more respected by the members of Irish congregations.

Rev. Thomas Dunkerley, B.A., said that, as perhaps he was the only one present who had been brought up in the Church of England, he might be allowed to say that, while he had felt some real good from the confirmation service of the Church of England, he yet felt that the deep-seated respect which obtained in Ireland for the first communion was far preferable. The catechetical questioning in the Episcopal service was disquieting to the minds of the young people, and therefore objectionable, since it happened at a time when the holiest and deepest feelings were most quick. He thought after some years had passed over Mr. Anthony's head he would feel that the preparation for the the first communion would obviate the need for confirmation or any other special dedication service.

Mr. R. M'Calmont said he felt that Mr. Anthony had brought before them a deeply interesting subject for conference, since every person interested in young people would desire to know more of the best methods of making complete the link between the School and the Church. Whatever method would be freest from superstition would be the one that would find most favour with him.

Rev. J. H. Bibby said that from the very happy way in which the subject had been put before them it was evident that Mr. Anthony had given the matter a deep and loving consideration. For himself he felt, as a young minister, that it was a matter of the deepest interest, for he would never forget how great a searching of heart he had when he first met a class of young communicants. It was a solemn thought to him that they were looking to him for some help towards a clearer view of the diviner life as it passed by. Mr. Anthony meant this confirmation service to be what the tree was to Zacchæus of old—a help to a better knowledge of divine things—and to a certain extent he would agree with the reader. As a stranger to this country he was peculiarly interested to find such a deep-seated respect for the communion service, and this made him anxious to give the service as solemn a feeling as possible. Under such conditions he would agree with a previous speaker, who preferred a careful preparation for the first communion rather than Mr. Anthony's plan. It was too "churchy," and, therefore, stood self-condemned among Irish Presbyterians.

Mr. Bulmer said that he felt it difficult for a layman to speak on a matter which was so largely a minister's question. He had been confirmed as a member of the Episcopal Church, and to that service he truly owed all the religious freedom he now enjoyed, for the catechising had set him thinking about the Church doctrines in detail, and the more he thought about them the more of a Unitarian he became. Now, if confirmation would always work the same good in all he was quite in favour of confirmation services. He feared that this could hardly be expected. He did not like anything that savoured of Ritualism, and he thought that a minister's class was the best of all for the transition period from school to church.

Rev. J. C. Street said that he believed they had a birthright in the Church of God, and that they needed no ceremony to bring them into it. He believed that the education of a

child from the outset should be a true preparation for the full fellowship of the Church of God. He did not believe in making special crises in the education of a child any more than he believed there were such crises in the life of a plant. With a previous speaker, he preferred to think that there need be no break in the continuity of a child's church life. As regarded a special confirmation service, he had no sympathy with it. The confirmation he believed in might come at any time to a young person—in the home, in the shop, in the mill, or in the play-ground. It might come as a shot from a bow drawn at venture more readily than from a time set apart for seeking the Divine presence. He felt for himself that by bringing religion to bear on every phase of human life he was doing that which was confirming men and women and children in that which was higher even than the Church—the true worship of the Father. He liked the simple service which offered the right hand of fellowship in a public way to the young people when they desired formally and seriously to take their places in the Church. He did not like any priestly act which made it appear that any child of God needed a special rite or ceremony to admit him into the Church. He feared formalism in religious matters above all things, for it had a tendency to make bigots. He could think of nothing more pernicious than a suggestion recently made that each sect should have full charge of the instruction of the children belonging to it. This would be the creation of bigotry and the confirmation of intolerence. This was not the freedom wherewith Christ had made them free.

Mr. Anthony having replied,

A hearty vote of thanks was given to the ladies for their kindly reception of the Conference. The vote was acknowledged by Mr. D. M'Master on behalf of the ladies at Moneyrea.

The meeting was closed with the benediction.

TO A FRIEND.

The tides of Life flow on, and bear
Us towards the everlasting shores.
Our bark of years, tossed to and fro,
With freight of joy and woe, floats o'er
The changing sea, and rides the main,
With tracks of troubled foam behind.
But still, with straining cord and sail,
Our prow meets unknown seas and makes
For sunny shore and peaceful cove
Where tranquil sea shall give it rest.
So you, dear Friend, are sailing on
And meeting storm, and heaving sea.
Life's joys and sorrows crowd your way
And make you feel the mighty swell
Of God's great sea. You sail in faith
And know that when the waves are passed
God's haven then will greet your sight
And you will have the endless joy.
As this fresh day now dawns, and new
Days meet your gaze, look forth with trust
And sail Life's Sea with growing faith
That He, who long has blessed your life,
Will crown it with His boundless love
And sanctify it evermore.

J. C. S.

The Treasurer of the Unitarian Society begs to acknowledge receipt of the following subscriptions for the year 1886:—

David Ritchie, Belfast, ...	£0	2	6
J. Lusk, Glenarm, ...	0	2	6
T. M'Clelland, J.P., Belfast, ..	0	10	0
Sir E. J. Harland, Bart., Belfast, ..	1	1	0
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Rosemary Street Mutual Improvement Association.

FIFTEENTH SESSION, 1886-87.

The Committee have much pleasure in announcing the following

PROGRAMME UNTIL CHRISTMAS, 1886.

1886.

Nov. 1.—Paper: "Socialism." Mr. Wm. Currie.
„ 8.—Lecture: "A Ramble through Dromore." Mr. John F. Mulligan.
„ 15.—Paper: "Wanderings in Rhineland and Vineland." Communicated.
„ 22.—Paper: "A Text from Tacitus." Mr. George Fisher.
„ 29.—Lecture: "The Secret of Good Government." Mr. Alex. Bowman.

Dec. 6.—Music and Readings.
„ 13.—Lecture: "John Wycliffe." Rev. W. Reynolds, B.A.
„ 20.—Miscellaneous Original Compositions.

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THE OBJECTS OF THE ASSOCIATION ARE

The intellectual and moral advancement of its members, and the furtherance of acquaintance and fellowship among them.

The Meetings are held on MONDAY EVENINGS at Eight o'clock, in the Rosemary Street Schools.

ADMISSION—To Lectures and Discussions—Members, Free; Non-Members, Sixpence each. To Papers, and Music and Readings—Free.

MEMBER'S SUBSCRIPTION—4s. per annum, which entitles to the use of the Library. Subscriptions for the Fifteenth Session are now due and should be paid to the Treasurer, DANIEL BULMER, 32 Queen Street, *as early as possible.*

The Library will be open at 1 p.m. on Sundays, and on every Monday Evening during the Session.

THE BELFAST UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

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Printed by JOHN A. MURPHY, 16, Howard Street, for the Unitarian Society, and Published at their Depository, 16, Queen's Arcade, Belfast.